

Top tips to calm anxious feelings

Practise **finger breathing** together: trace the outside of each finger. As you go up each finger, breathe in, as you move down towards the web part of the finger, breathe out.

'Bubble breaths' is a calming and fun exercise to do together. Bubbles work with washing up liquid, shampoo etc. This exercise helps teach your child to take deep breaths from the stomach and slowly exhale. Explain to your child that when they become anxious, the brain wants more air but the lungs are too upset to give it. However, if your child breathes deeply, the brain tells the heart to slow down and the lungs can then work better. If your child practises this breathing when blowing actual bubbles, the hope is that they will learn to take bubble breaths when they start to feel anxious, to help calm the feelings of panic.

'Party Hats on Monsters' - this is based on the idea that most children find it easier to draw their worries, instead of putting them into words. This exercise is most successful when it's a gradual, step-by-step process.

- Step 1 is to encourage your child to draw something that makes them feel happy or safe. You can then have a casual chat about what they have drawn - try to wonder about things with them, instead of asking direct questions. (It can be useful to remind them about their image of happiness or safety when they are feeling unsafe or worried).
- Step 2 is to ask your child to draw something that scares them a little. Then ask them to change the drawing so that it seems less scary. It is amazing how many children realise that when they change the drawing on paper, they can also change the image in their head so that it is less scary. This exercise can be done again and again, to practise changing the image in their mind, but also to work through a series of fears.

Colour your Worries: explore the feeling of worry. What does it feel like when a panic attack starts? What does it feel like in the panic? What does it feel like afterwards? Perhaps you could link each stage to a colour and draw it, or form it in Play Doh? Learning to work through this series of colours in the mind may your child feel more in control of the panic attack.